

Hill, J. M. (1935)

HEROES OF TEXAS

JAMES MONROE HILL

BATTLE OF SAN JACINTO

Edited by His Daughter

MRS. LUCY AMANDA HILL JONES



Compliments

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(1935)

Recollections of James Monroe Hill

(Written by his own hand.)

Austin, Texas, October 19, 1897

"I, James Monroe Hill, was born in Putman County, Georgia, on the Oconee River, March 13, 1818; lived several years near Hillsborough, Jasper County, and afterwards in Columbus, Muscogee County, at the head of navigation on the Chattahoochee River.

"From Columbus I came with my father's family to Texas in the spring of 1835; the family consisting of father, mother, three brothers besides myself, and six sisters younger than myself. One brother was older than myself, but was sickly, so the burden of hard work was put on me to do and I did it. My older brother and I planted corn, commencing on the Fourth of July, of the year mentioned and we made enough bread corn to do for the family until the next crop.

"In the spring of 1836 my father's family were living in Washington County, Texas, and we were trying to improve a new place near Captain H. Chriesman's, having to split rails, break new land, and make a post oak rail fence and build houses such as we were obliged to live in. Thus you see we had a heavy task. My father and older brother did all they could, but my brother was sick most of the time so the hardest part of the work fell on me to do and I did it with a vim.

"You see there was mother, the best mother in the world, and six sisters younger than myself and two young brothers and I was just eighteen on the 13th of March, 1836.

"A short time before this date we heard of the invasion on Texas soil by Santa Anna's army of 15,000 well equipped soldiers. My father decided that I should stay at home and do as much work as I could and he would go to the front and see if we were needed more there than at home. So in a few days he was back, having reached Gonzales and heard of the fall of the Alamo and that Houston had ordered a retreat and also ordered Fannin to join him.

"I was ready, on my father's return, with my bullets, molded and patched, by my sisters. My father started right back to join Houston with seven others besides myself—Nicholas Whitehead, Charley Williams, W. D. Scates and others.

"When we got to the Colorado River at Burnam's Crossing we found Houston's trail. He had crossed there and gone down the river toward Columbus. We, the nine, came to a detachment of his army just above Columbus, guarding the ford of the river. In this detachment was W. W. Hill's company and I immediately joined it. My father proceeded down the river to report to Houston and I did not see him again until after Houston had ordered the next retreat to the Brazos. He then came to me and showed me his furlough and detail to tell all the families that he could see and send word to others to cross the Brazos, that the enemy was crossing down at "Tusky Seat" (Atasca Sita) crossing, on the Colorado and to tell them that he, Houston, would keep between them and the enemy.

"Now, the order was given for our detachment to join with the main army of Houston out at the edge of the timber and prairie, on the road to San Felipe. It was early in the day when we joined the main army. It was thought there were over two thousand men there.

"The line of march was taken up toward San Felipe, across the Bernard. We camped there that night. Here was a trying time to a great many, I suppose, as I then heard and afterward learned from good authority that the night we camped at "Old San Felipe" over five hundred men left without leave from the commanding general, some with good excuse and others without any.

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"The next morning our army was ordered to march up the Brazos, across Mill Creek. We camped between Mill Creek and the Brazos. One man died that night of quinsy.

"I think we camped out of the bottom one more night and then went into the bottom and camped in there twelve days. Nothing of importance transpired in these twelve days, except one of the regulars by the name of Garner deserted and was sentenced by Houston to be shot. His grave was dug and he was placed at one end of it and a file of soldiers at the other ready to fire, and at that moment he was reprieved and afterward made a good soldier at the battle.

"During our stay in the Brazos bottom some of our soldiers would become mutinous, especially after a rain, which was frequent. Their guns would get wet and they would shoot them off, contrary to General Houston's orders, and it was painful to hear him swear and take our Maker's name in vain. He would order them put under guard. The most of us tried to keep our guns dry and to obey orders.

small quantity of corn in it, we would sometimes have to grind it a second time to make it a little finer, but it was coarse at best, though by scalding it, bran and all, and putting it in a "skillet" with plenty of coals under it and fire on the lid we had a good 'pone' of bread. Our butcher knife was passed through the pone so that each one could get an equal share and we were very thankful, too, that we could have that good a show for bread to go with our beef.

"Nearly every mess had a steel mill screwed to a sapling. It was commonly called Armstrong's mill and it had two cranks. When we would grind our,

"As I have said, we had a great deal of rain during our stay on the south side of the bottom. The Brazos River was bankful and no ferry boat to cross us over. General Houston sent up to Washington to intercept the "Yellowstone" steamboat, which had gone up after cotton during the big rise in the river. She came down and crossed our army over at "Groce's Retreat." We camped at Donahoo's the first night and at this place we left our captain, W. W. Hill, ill with the measles.

"After we started the few baggage wagons we had would bog down and General Houston would alight from his horse with his long saber hung to his side with buckskin and would say: 'Here, boys, let's help them out,' and he would take hold of the rear wheel and you could feel distinctly when he surged, especially if you were at another wheel. It struck me forcibly that that was the sort of a general to have.

"Here, at Donahoo's we received the two (twin) 6-pound cannons. The next night we camped, I think at McCurley's on Spring Creek, and then the course was taken for Harrisburg. I had all confidence in our commanding general.

"Nothing in particular transpired on the way, except a sensation caused by a Mrs. Mann trying to rescue some oxen which had been impressed by Rorher, the teamster.

"We camped on Buffalo Bayou, just below Harrisburg, and on the opposite side from that place. While at that camp Deaf Smith captured a courier with dispatches to Santa Anna from his command on the Brazos.

"The next day we were drawn up in a hollow square and General Houston made a speech to us, in purport: 'You have been wanting to fight, you shall now have a chance,' and continuing, said, 'I now have the enemy where I want him.---Let your battle cry be "Remember the Alamo!"' Then General Rusk spoke to us in eloquent words, also saying 'Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!'

"After the speeches were over we repaired to camp and there learned that a detail was to be made of ten men from each company to take care of the sick and baggage and that the detail was to be made on left of company. We

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were then ordered to prepare three days' rations and mine was a pint of flour and one chop of beef. (Not a whole rib like Mother Eve was made of.) I had my chop with a stick run through it and sticking in the ground before a fire cooking. An order was given to fall in line. I had my pint of flour in a knapsack. I gathered it, gun, shot, pouch and blanket and ran by the fire and jerked up my rib chop of beef and broke for the line and was ninth getting into line.

"There was considerable trouble in crossing the bayou to the south side, having to use a little square, flat boat, with an extra floor laid on top, having been taken from the floor of a deserted cabin nearby. Two or three men were bailing for life to keep the thing from sinking before it could be crossed with a load. It had to be worked fast, as there was a great deal for it to do in a short time. It being done, we traveled nearly all night on the night of the 19th of April, 1836. We laid down to rest a little while before day on the 20th. We were ordered to march at daylight and at about 8 o'clock a halt was ordered for five minutes. I tried to take advantage of the five. I jerked out my flint, steel and spunk, struck fire to spunk, ignited it, grabbed up some dry grass, put the spunk in it and swung it around in my hand furiously and it soon blazed in my hand. Holding it loosely I put it in a bunch of dry grass and adding dry brush had a fire. I had a Spanish gourd swinging to my belt and a tin cup. I put a little of my pint of flour in the cup, with water made a dough and wrapped it around a stick, held it over the blaze and succeeded in getting it black and hot, when the order was given to march. It had been only a three-minute stop.

"I learned to my satisfaction that our spies had discovered some of the enemy's spies, so there was now some assurance that we would soon meet them in battle. We marched on down toward them and they were coming toward us. We met each other on the 20th, I suppose about 10 o'clock. The enemy took position with their cannon several hundred yards off and commenced firing on us. Houston had taken position on Buffalo Bayou, above where the cemetery is now. Santa Anna's forces soon came up to an island of timber within rifle shot of some of our men and firing commenced with our cannon and some of our rifles. Santa Anna then withdrew to where the battle was fought the next day and began his fortifications.

"There was a brisk cavalry fight that evening, in which young Trask was severely wounded and Mirabeau B. Lamar distinguished himself for his daring bravery, for which he was chosen to command the cavalry in the first skirmish with the main forces. In the morning of this day, the 20th, Colonel Neill, who commanded the artillery, was severely wounded during the fight by a grapeshot from the enemy's cannon.

"General Cos came in with his division about 9 o'clock on the 21st and reinforced Santa Anna with 600 men, so estimated, and Santa Anna's previous force being 1800 the two together were 2400. Our force, besides those left at the upper camp, was 783. This, then, was the number of our army. We kept ready at a moment's warning to fight if charged on that day or night.

"After Cos' division came in Houston sent 'Deaf Smith' to burn the bridge on Vince's Bayou.

"At about 3:30 o'clock in the afternoon of the 21st the order was given to fall in line, we were going to fight now. The order was hardly given sooner than obeyed, for we kept ready all the time. We had nothing else to do—and we did that with a will. Each company took its place in line and we marched through the north end of the island of timber. Houston passed by me riding a gray dappled horse, his big saber swinging by the buckskin strings to his belt, and I thought him the finest looking man I had ever seen—or ever yet have seen. I thought it probable that either he or his horse would be shot. A noted mark for the enemy. I had all confidence in his bravery.

"Burlson's regiment marched straight toward the point of timber where the breastworks proved to be. Sherman's regiment deployed to the left in the

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direction of the point of timber highest up on the San Jacinto. Millard's division was to our right. I was in Burleson's regiment and the cannon was between Burleson's and Millard's.

"When we got within 600 yards of the enemy they opened fire on us and a line of battle was formed by Burleson's regiment deploying to the left and Millard's to the right. The 'twin sisters' unlimbered and the cannonier hitched themselves to them and the caissons in less time than it takes to tell it and were ready for the charge, they being on the right of Burleson's and left of Millard's command.

"Those mentioned were in line, ready just at that time, but General Sherman's division having much farther to go in deploying was not in line. Hence, Colonel Sommerville came down the line. 'Tell General Sherman to hurry up his regiment!' I thought anybody who could 'holler' loud was commended, so I pitched in, with others, and yelled to the command as loudly as I could. Sherman got there with a vim! The command then rang along the line: 'Forward! Double quick!' We all knew the battle cry, 'Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!' and it was shouted with a will. We felt that this forward movement was a most important one and I suppose many of us invoked the help and guidance of God, the upholder of the just, and in whose hands we could safely place our cause. My own prayer was, 'Lord, save our country now, and if necessary let me be sacrificed—I will do my best and leave the result to Thee! There was about five hundred yards to go in double quick time, while we shouted our war cry. When within about four hundred yards of their breastworks the balls rained among us, wounding several of our company. I heard them cry out they were shot. We kept right on, not turning and not firing until we got within easy rifle shot. Then we were ordered to fire. The enemy fired by platoons and the smoke was so dense that we could not see a man until it rose. We did not waste our ammunition by shooting through dense smoke. At our first fire the objects fell behind their breastworks. At our second fire they began a retreat. Their officers did their best to stop them, but they were shot down so fast by our unerring rifles they could not stand them and could not be checked by their own officers, who frequently tried to do so, but we followed them up so closely and darted bullets into them so fast they kept moving.

"As I passed down the flat lands I saw General Houston on a different horse. I afterward heard that it was the third one, two having been killed under him. I did not then know that he himself was wounded. I saw him again at nightfall on the battlefield as we were returning with prisoners. It was dark when we arrived at camp and we were willing and thankful to rest, being so very tired that hunger did not pinch as hard. While passing through the Mexican camp with our prisoners we saw large kettles, about two feet high and one foot in diameter, filled with beef and boiling and the odor of it made me very hungry, but some of our men said they were poisoned. I have wanted to kick myself ever since for believing such foolishness.

"Well, we thought that day we had killed about fifteen hundred or two thousand, but later accounts say less than that number.

"The 22nd we came in and I was on guard that day, guarding prisoners and their arsenal. Our general was wounded and lying on a mattress on the first bank, under a big tree, just below our company on the bayou. Our feelings were hard to describe.

"We got plenty to eat, after my chop and pint of flour gave out. In our hearts was a feeling of thankfulness to God and consciousness that we did our duty well—and in mine a longing too, to know what my dear mother, father, sisters and afflicted brother would think when they would hear the news of what we had done.

"A chance to return home now! No more wading through mud and swollen streams! In this hour of rejoicing there was a grateful feeling to Almighty God, the director of those who put their trust in Him. In the evening of the

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22nd three of our trusted scouts came riding into camp with a man riding behind one of them. At this time I had just been relieved off guard. A great many prisoners among those nearest the three scouts and the back rider arose to their feet and shouted, 'General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, el presidente!' They halted and Santa Anna slipped down and appeared very restless. He told his captors, so I afterward learned, that he wanted to be taken to Houston. They started on down the hill and he, Santa Anna, tried to run, but was checked. I followed them down the hill and arrived just as he was being introduced to Houston. Moses Austin Bryan tells better than I can the conversation which took place, though I was there and heard it. (See appendix to these lines.) General Rusk also took part with General Houston in the conversation and they both displayed wisdom and good judgment. Santa Anna requested that Almonte be sent for to interpret for him and it was done.

"We remained in camp several days. Then General Rusk took command and we started toward the Brazos and camped on the bayou, below where the city of Houston is now. We then had plenty of pack mules.

"The most notable event that transpired was that General Woll came in with a flag of truce. We believed him to be a spy and felt more like shooting him than we had Santa Anna.

"Our army under General Lusk proceeded on the march across the Brazos, Colorado, Lavaca, Navidad and San Antonio Rivers and on out to Coletto. We made headquarters there for some months, with an increase of more than three times the number of men we had at San Jacinto.

"During our stay at Coletto, Hoxey and Dexter fought a duel. * * *

(Here the manuscript was left unfinished.)

RECOLLECTIONS OF MRS. JANE HALLOWELL HILL (Wife of James Monroe Hill.)

Austin, Texas, March 2, 1898

"I was born in Middle Tennessee, Giles County, near Cornersville, October 28, 1824. My parents, Hugh and Lucy Kerr, came to Texas by steamboat to New Orleans, then took passage on a schooner and—as well as I remember—were 14 days crossing the gulf. We landed at Harrisburg, Texas, where we remained a few weeks. We then came to a place where the town of Millican now is, and afterwards located in Washington County; having only one neighbor nearer than twelve miles of us.

"In the year 1836 we were in the "Runaway Scrape," (as it was then called), fleeing from Santa Anna's army. It was thought that they would over-run the whole country, sparing none. We had a terrible time travelling through mud and water, as it rained most of the time. Some of the rivers were three miles wide, which we had to cross in small ferry-boats all through the bottoms, or valleys. We kept on until within twenty-five miles of the Sabine River, stopping at San Augustine. We remained there until the next fall, for we feared to return sooner to our home on account of the danger of Indian depredations.

"Our first year spent in the new home (before we had had time to raise corn) we often had to do without bread—at one time for three weeks. The Indians were friendly then, and a band of them camped by a spring near our house. They used to hunt and would share their game with us; and, knowing that we were without bread at this time they went off some distance to buy corn meal. On their return they divided the small quantity they had with my mother, who at once had the cook to make some bread, and—with tears streaming down her face—she divided it among the children, both white and black, not tasting it herself.

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"Not long after our return from San Augustine the Indians stole two horses from us, the men being absent at the time, and my small brother (Alfred) and I kept watch throughout the next night. The negroes had to work in the day-time preparing for the support of the family; for we had been robbed of nearly everything we had to leave when we fled from the Mexicans. My mother had to sell a half-league of land to buy a team and wagon before we could move back, as we had to leave ours, and the cattle we had started with, on account of the high water.*

"Mother was so distressed when she heard of the fall of the Alamo that she took only one trunk, some bedding and provisions, leaving a good supply of everything at home. On our return we found most of our books, only missing one Bible. Everything else had been taken away. The Mexican army had camped within five miles of our house, and burned the fence rails to make their camp fires. Whole families had been captured and killed not far from where we lived.

"I was married to James Monroe Hill in 1843, and we celebrated our 'Golden Wedding' in 1893 in Austin, our present home. All of our children, and most of our grand-children, were with us on that occasion.

"After my marriage my home for forty-one years was in Fayette County, Texas. It then became necessary to move; and though it was very hard to give up my old home, the birthplace of my children, yet I have been well satisfied with Austin, and expect to remain here as long as I live. Our four sons (with their families) have followed us here, and we feel that we have much to make us happy in our old age. They are so good to us, and we have many kind friends. I often contrast the present with the past, and feel truly thankful that our Heavenly Father has brought us safely through the many dangers we had to pass in early life.

"Both Crockett and Travis spent one night at my mother's home when on their way to San Antonio. I remember well how they looked. What a pleasure it was to entertain those who came to defend us.

"My husband is a San Jacinto Veteran, and will be eighty years old on the thirteenth of this month, March (1898). He and our two oldest sons were in the Confederate service, the older one being in General Forest's Cavalry. His son, Leonidas Edwin Hill, of this city, is our oldest grandson."

(Here the manuscript was left unfinished.)

APPENDIX BY MRS. LUCY AMANDA HILL JONES

(Daughter)

"The following is a copy of statements made by Moses Austin Bryan to my father, as taken down by myself at the time that they were in conversation together during one of the reunions of veterans, about the year 1890 in Brenham, Texas, to which I was an interested listener. Major Bryan said:

"Colonel George W. Hockley and Major Ben F. Smith brought Santa Anna to Houston's presence. Colonel Hockley said: "General Houston, here is General Santa Anna, el presidente de Mexico, comandante en jefe del exercito de operaciones, y me pongo a la disposicion del galente General Houston, y ser tratado como debe ser un general, cuando es prisionero dignero." Houston's reply: 'Ah, ah, happy to see you general. Take a seat, sir, take a seat.' (Waving with his left hand to an old stool chest near by)."

"Major Bryan said that five persons (Americans) including himself, were present when Santa Anna was brought before Houston. Continuing, he said: 'The second night after the capture of Santa Anna I was sergeant of the guard

*Her father, who was then merchandising in New Orleans, had returned again to that place, after bringing for the family's needs bountiful supplies of groceries, etc.

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around the tent in which he was confined. Houston occupied Santa Anna's tent, the Texans having had no tents previous to the capture of Santa Anna. Houston was lying on a mattress brought from a house on the opposite side of the bayou from the Texans' camp—Santa Anna proposed to send an order to General Filisola (second in command) then stationed on the Brazos, to move out of the country toward Mexico, to which Rusk replied: "General Santa Anna, General Filisola would not obey your order, you being now a prisoner." Santa Anna then said, interpreted by Almonte: "Such is the love of Filisola and my other officers for me that they would obey any command issued by me, although a prisoner." "

Appendix continued:

James Monroe Hill, a native Georgian, came with his father and others of the family to Texas in the spring of 1835 and settled in Washington County, where they lived at the time of the invasion of Santa Anna and his hordes on Texas' soil.

It was there, in 1837, James M. Hill first met the youthful daughter of Hugh Kerr and Lucy Thomson Kerr and niece of Alexander Thomson, early Texas colonist. She was then about twelve years of age. In recounting this meeting to his children in later years, he added, "but, like Jacob, I had to serve seven years for your mother's consent to marry me; and then she said she had to consent to 'get rid' of me." At the early age of eleven years she, with her mother and others of her family, were in the so-called "Runaway Scrape," many thrilling incidents of which were related by her in after years to her children. In 1840 James Monroe Hill and Jane Hallowell Kerr attended Rutgersville College together when that staunch Methodist, Rev. Chauncy Richardson, was President. On September 14, 1843, they were married and immediately removed to Fayette County, Texas, about twelve miles from La-Grange, and lived in a modest little house such as, at that early period, the pioneers built by the labor of their own hands. There they heroically struggled together to maintain their growing family. After the births of their two eldest boys, James Leonidas and John William, they selected a site on a commanding hill near by and had constructed upon it a large and substantial residence, where all of their children were reared, with the exception of a little daughter, Iola Jane, who died in infancy. The names of their other children were: Homer Barksdale, George Alfred, Lucy Amanda, Mary Elizabeth, Frank Webb, and Nola.

At the age of sixteen years James Leonidas Hill enlisted in the Civil War, serving under General Forest throughout the four years wherever duty called, but at no time within the borders of his own state. When about twenty-six years of age he was married to Annie Fordtran, daughter of Charles and Almeida Fordtran, and death claimed him in less than two years, leaving his widow and infant son, Leonidas Edwin Hill, now residing with his family in Seattle, Washington.

John William Hill, second son of James M. and Jane H. Hill, was married to Grace Pearsall, and they were the parents of nine children, four sons and five daughters—all greatly honored. The daughters and two sons survive their parents.

Dr. Homer Barksdale Hill was married to Ella Rankin. Their children were three in number. The only one of this branch of the family now living is Mrs. Lutch Stark of Orange.

George A. Hill was married first to his brother's widow. They had two children, Chester and Louise, neither of whom are now living. His last wife, formerly Julia McHugh, survives him and resides in Houston. They were the parents of two sons now living, Raymond Monroe Hill and George A. Hill, Jr.,* all well known in Houston.

*President, Houston Oil Company, Houston.

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There are two surviving daughters of James M. and Jane H. Hill, Mrs. Lucy Hill Jones of Austin and Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Flewellen of Belton. The latter has five living children.

Frank Webb Hill (the youngest and only surviving son) and wife, formerly May Blanton, now reside in Austin, their son and daughter, with their families living near them. Also Mrs. Hill's sister, Dr. Annie Webb Blanton. Congressman T. L. Blanton is her brother.

James Monroe Hill, son of Asa Hill and grandson of Isaac Hill, spent his early youth enduring many hardships, sacrifices, and privations, incident to pioneer days, in the service of his state in the Civil War, in Indian raids, and in other capacities, the most important of which being (at the age of eighteen) a participant in the Battle of San Jacinto; a service which he was ever proud of having been privileged to perform. Indeed to the end of his well spent life, at the age of eighty-six years, he had continued throughout to retain a feeling akin to adoration for his adopted state, Texas, and paramount to every other noble desire for her future betterment was his sincere wish for the ultimate construction of a university of the first class for her youth, in whom he ever felt a keen interest.

James Monroe Hill passed on February 14, 1904, nearly twenty-two years later than his beloved boyhood companion and cousin, the late renowned Senator Benjamin Harvey Hill, of Georgia.

MRS. LUCY AMANDA HILL JONES,
2111 David Street,
Austin, Texas.

October 15, 1934.

